



## Mathematics and tartan. Meet a Cracovian studying in Edinburgh!

2022-02-26

**He is a second-year mathematics student at the University of Edinburgh, a member of the Scottish-Polish Cultural Association in Edinburgh and other societies. On Facebook, he runs an author profile "Cracovian studying in Edinburgh". He is also the first Cracovian to wear a kilt made of Cracovian tartan. Rafał Krajewski-Siuda is interviewed by Agata Mierzyńska.**

*Agata Mierzyńska: Are you a native of Kraków over the generations?*

Rafał Krajewski-Siuda: I was born in Katowice, since my parents lived there at the time. We came back to Kraków after we recovered the family house left by my great-grandmother. My family has been connected to Kraków for generations. Among others, the papal chamberlain, Father Antoni Gruszecki (1850-1930), builder of St. Joseph's Church in Podgórze, portrayed by his friend Jan Matejko in the painting "Kościuszko pod Racławicami" belonged to our family. I have many relatives and cousins in Kraków.

*Where did the idea to study in Edinburgh come from?*

R. K.-S.: I wanted to study in Edinburgh because I am interested in mathematics. The Faculty of Mathematics in Edinburgh has very good lecturers and researchers in the field of algebraic geometry, which is a field of particular interest to me. The university itself is one of the best in Europe and in the world.

*Was it difficult to get into this university? What does recruitment look like?*

Recruitment to study in the UK is through the UCAS system. There you choose 5 universities to which you would like to apply. A personal statement is attached, consisting of a few sentences about the person (cover letter) and a reference (teacher's reference). Those who are qualified may be accepted unconditionally, but this is not the rule. Those who are not qualified - receive a conditional offer from the university. It was my case - I had to meet additional requirements concerning matriculation and only then I was accepted. The university takes an individual approach. In this recruitment, everything was conducted by correspondence - in mathematics there were no personal interviews, due to pandemic restrictions.

Krzysztof Krajewski-Siuda, Rafał's dad, adds that his son is modest, because he didn't say that he passed his maturity exam with a very high score - higher than 99% of the students. He studied in a good class (algorithmic) at V Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Augusta Witkowskiego w Krakowie (August Witkowski 5<sup>th</sup> Upper Secondary School in Kraków). Its graduates, currently studying at the first year at the Jagiellonian University, representing a very high level of knowledge and fell a bit bored. In Edinburgh the system allows to go right to the second year of studies, if the student's competence is sufficient. They noticed Rafał's very high grades in his final exams and, once he passed the tests - also with very high scores - and after additional interviews, he was offered to study in the second year of studies.

R. K.-S.: In the procedure, being already a student you can apply for transfer to the second year.



*Have you been of the highest math scores in school?*

R. K.-S.: No, I was not. Certainly one of my classmates was better.

*Please tell us about your other interests besides mathematics.*

R. K.-S.: In upper secondary school I was interested in Latin and ancient culture, and I was a finalist in the Latin subject competition (olympics). I also try to expand my interests in music, especially contemporary classical music f.i. Xenakis and free jazz. I also currently belong to a parachute club. In Scotland there is an extensive system of sports clubs organised by students and this is how sports activities are carried out. There is no such subject as physical education at university. I also belong to a golf club, but the weather has not been good this school semester, so I have not had the opportunity to attend. Only students who had already participated in tournaments were able to play.

*Are the studies currently conducted remotely in Edinburgh?*

R. K.-S.: The workshops are stationary, they are held in small groups, but the lectures are remote. I don't know how many students there are, but because of Brexit there are less Europeans, more the Asians are noticeable.

*Before coming to Edinburgh to study, did you know Edinburgh?*

R. K.-S.: Before my arrival I knew very little about Edinburgh, only about its university. I visited Edinburgh in 2005, when I was 3 years old. At the time my parents gave me a teddy bear Edgar, which I still have. And I have a picture of me in a kilt from that time.

K. K.-S.: Rafał came to see me in Edinburgh, as I was there on a scholarship commemorating the Polish Medical Faculty, which was the only university for Poles during the war.

*So how is Edinburgh now - after Brexit, how do you see the atmosphere there?*

R. K.-S.: Due to Brexit the cost of studying in Edinburgh, in the whole UK, is much higher - this is a big change. Poles will now study more often in the Netherlands and Denmark, because the annual expense of tuition fees is now high, averaging around £20,000. Scots are aware of the undesirable effects of Brexit: no economic growth, rising prices. I had chance to meet those who voted against leaving the European Union.

*Do you see any similarities between Kraków and Edinburgh?*

Both cities are old, historic, located at the foot of castles. They have long history and rich academic and cultural traditions. From my perspective, Edinburgh is mainly an academic city. Many buildings belong to the university and are scattered around the city. Actually, my department, mathematics, is located on the outskirts of the city. There are also many interesting museums. And so, together with 7 colleagues from different countries, we formed a group and agreed to regularly visit Edinburgh museums and go to concerts at the Usher Hall. Our group is multicultural, it is very interesting to exchange experiences and perspectives. My



closest colleagues are a Korean from Singapore and a Pakistani from Wales. There is also an exchange student in the group, Albert from Vienna, who is studying in France. I also met a Polish woman from Warsaw with parents of Vietnamese origin. We met on some occasion and it was surprising to me when she suddenly started speaking Polish.

K.K.-S.: I believe that the story is also very important in both cities. These are cities rich in literature. Without stories Kraków has no history, and without stories also Edinburgh could be the same (there is even a Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh). Those are cities of literature (Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Canon Doyle, JK. Rowling on the one hand, and Szymborska, Miłosz, or Lem on the other, just to name a few). There are also many unique traditions, customs.... tartan, the Fringe Festival, the nativity scene, the Lajkonik, and so on.

*What are your plans for the future? Do you see it connected with Edinburgh?*

R. K.-S.: I would like to focus my future on algebraic geometry, on scientific work in a research center which carries out interesting projects. I do not know whether I will return to Kraków or stay in Edinburgh. Right now I am concentrated on developing this interest. I have many possibilities, so I don't want to declare now.

*What would say about Edinburgh inhabitants?*

R. K.-S.: So far because of the pandemic, social life is limited. Edinburgh people are open-minded. I don't know those who were in favor of Brexit. The people I met were either indifferent or against leaving the EU. And at the university everyone is active, willing to participate in new projects or social activities.

*Have you met Poles living in Edinburgh? There is a very large Polish community there, from two periods: post-war and the last 20 years.*

R. K.-S.: I met a Polish man from Washington who studies in Edinburgh. There is an interesting story that three Poles living in the U.S. capital, studying in the same school, without knowing each other, decided to study in Edinburgh. But I haven't met anyone from the Polish community here yet. I met a few people from the Scottish-Polish Cultural Association, but it was a short get-together.

*Have you had a chance to take part in the projects of Scottish-Polish Cultural Association?*

R. K.-S.: Because of the pandemic there has only been one meeting so far - a Christmas carol concert, organised in cooperation with the scouts. Currently, the Association's activities for public are mainly based on online lectures - several have been organized in the past year.

*What do you think: what Kraków may learn from Edinburgh, and in turn, Edinburgh learn from Kraków?*

R. K.-S.: The cities can exchange their cultural offerings, and support each other in organising various events in this sphere. The great scientific and artistic potential of both cities creates



opportunities for development and can be translated into cooperation in the fields of museology, literature, visual arts, or education, e.g. student exchange. It would be very interesting to start scientific cooperation between universities, or maybe it already exists?

K. K.-S.: There are only private scholarships, such as the Polish Faculty of Medicine Memorial Fund. It has a doctor, Dr. Maria Długolecka-Graham, who is involved in organizing various activities within this Fund. I was on this scholarship in 2005, when the 50th anniversary of its establishment was celebrated. The celebration, organised on a grand scale, was accompanied by the opening of an exhibition featuring Princess Anne. The fund itself was created from donations, bequests of Polish doctors who graduated from the department. A substantial sum of over a million pounds was raised and to this day, the interest is used to fund scholarships for short research internships for doctors, young Polish scientists. Some graduates of this department, such as the later Professor Antoni Kepinski, have returned to Poland.

Universities seem unprepared for Brexit. There are no tools to help students from the EU, there are only single proposals like the Coca Cola scholarship - to equalize opportunities, but only for 3-4 year studies, and only for Poles, Romanians and Bulgarians. The scale of assistance is small.

R. K.-S.: There are also grants for poor people, but you have to meet the criterion of low income.

*Finally, let's go back to the tartan. How do you feel wearing Cracovian tartan? Where have you had the opportunity to present it? What are the reactions in Edinburgh and Krakow?*

R. K.-S.: I feel honored to wear a kilt made of Kraków tartan. This is a tribute to the Scots, who cherish the kilt tradition. It originated in clan customs, but then passed on to cities and institutions. An alternative for me could have been the University of Edinburgh's tartan, donated to it recently, in 2007. But I preferred to emphasize that I come from Kraków, that I am Polish. It is also a promotion of our city. I posted my pictures in a kilt on various Scottish portals, and they aroused a lot of interest. People are asking where they can read more about Kraków and Poland!

Personally, the symbolism of the Kraków tartan, which has squares of 200 threads, is very appealing to me, referring to the dimensions of the Kraków market square - the largest medieval square in Europe. The yellow color reminds us of the Sigismund Chapel, the gray refers to the courage of Szare Szeregi (the Grey Ranks). This is important to me because my great-grandfather, scoutmaster Waclaw Albin Krajewski, alias "Wrzos" (1912-1974), was the first commander of the Grey Ranks in the Piotrków area. In addition, the colors of the tartan refer to the colors of Scotland and Kraków, and the three white stripes refer to the symbolism of the Holy Trinity, which is - as intended by the author of the design, Alex Imrie - a tribute to Pope John Paul II.

*Thank you for the talk and I wish you all success!*